

WOMT Summary 12/19/2008

The five agencies (NMFS, FWS, DFG, USBR and DWR) participated in a WOMT discussion this morning regarding operation of the DCC under the North Delta Salmon Outmigration Study. Currently, the DCC operation is in an experimental mode which is closed at night and open during the day to try to determine if there is a benefit to both juvenile salmon emigration survival and water quality. The gates are closed about 60% of the time each day.

NMFS recommended closing the gates 100% of the time beginning on Saturday, 12/20/2008, for the protection of winter run and yearling spring run. NMFS' draft biological opinion analyzed the effects of current gate closures, and, based on this draft analysis, NMFS is recommending that DCC gates be closed after December 15th every year. At this time, NMFS does not believe that the current salmon decision tree contained in the 2004 biological opinion is sufficiently protective on out-migrating juveniles after December 15th. NMFS has made some accommodation in order to allow the USGS experiment to occur, but closure is now recommended. After reviewing data from previous years, NMFS professional opinion is that under the current dry hydrology there are likely to be some winter-run and some yearling spring-run in the vicinity of the DCC right now. This is despite the fact that these fish have not yet been detected in the Knights Landing rotary screw trap. NMFS has had several biologists review the rotary screw trap data and collection methodology, and is concerned that it is not sufficiently accurate measure on which to base an adaptive action after December 15th. This is primarily due to the limited sampling area of the river captured by the screw trap, as well as other sampling errors that may occur. In addition, NMFS cited the following additional reasons for determining that full closure is necessary: 1) the low population level of the current winter-run cohort, 2) delays in closing DCC if we operate based on the observed data, 3) the current and projected low levels in Shasta are likely to further effect the remaining two cohorts, 4) the need to protect the diversity in run timing by protecting the full distribution of the of the population (i.e. not waiting until a number of fish have passed through the gates to close them).

Reclamation recommended, in the absence of criteria to indicate a significant number of listed species are in the vicinity of the DCC, to allow the DCC to remain in the experimental mode until Monday, 12/22/2008, to allow the collection of an estimated 90% of the experimental data passing the DCC. DWR joined the recommendation. Preliminary data from the experiment to date indicate that nighttime closure of the DCC can provide substantial protection for winter-run out-migration. Under the current hydrology, DFG does not expect a significant number of winter run or yearling spring run would have emigrated to the Delta yet, although acknowledges the water clarity would allow some to pass the rotary screw trap at Knights Landing undetected. DFG pointed out the difference between gates closed 60% of the time and closed 100% over 2 days, is not that great, but acknowledges that NMFS is under great scrutiny by the federal court. FWS asked NMFS if the value of the information collected in this experiment for long-term salmon management was considered. The WOMT agency representatives could not reach consensus and further discussions will occur in a subsequent conference call with WOMT agency management.

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